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## A PUBERTY CEREMONY OF THE MISSION INDIANS<sup>1</sup>

By HORATIO N. RUST

In 1889 the author attended a puberty ceremony of the Mission Indians at Campo near the Mexican line in southern California. Word had been sent out that the ceremony would be held near this place. Friendly tribes were invited. Among others twenty-five Yumas came across the desert by a trail which leads by the new settlement of Imperial. The writer saw them crossing a mountain ridge mounted on ponies, in Indian file, gaily attired, presenting a most picturesque sight.

An Indian fiesta is usually much the same, though it may be assembled for various purposes. It consists of a general gathering of entire families, and eating, drinking, horse-racing, gambling, and all kinds of merrymaking are indulged in night and day continuously for about a week, or until food is exhausted and the sharpest gamblers have secured all the money and valuables at hand.

The present ceremony has been observed by the different tribes of Mission Indians of southern California from time immemorial. It has been described under various names, such as the "roasting of girls." It was learned from careful inquiry among the old women that the object of the ceremony is to prepare the girls for matrimony. As they arrive at the age of puberty they are informed of the object of the ceremony and told that they have been selected for it. They look forward to the event with pleasure rather than dread, for contrary to what has been represented there is nothing in it that is repulsive. The object of the present account of this ceremony as it was witnessed is particularly to show its relation to a certain sacred curved stone which was then new to the author, and to point out its possible relation to the sacrificial yoke or "Maya stone" of Mexico.

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<sup>1</sup> Read at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, August 30.

In the open space between the booths prepared for the guests a space was cleared for the dancers. Near this a pit was dug about three feet deep and five feet in diameter. In this pit a fire had been built which had warmed the damp earth and caused steam to arise through the green herbs with which the pit was nearly filled. The girls appeared wrapped in blankets. They lay down upon the green herbs and were covered with blankets. Finding themselves comfortable, they appeared very happy, peering out through their covers, laughing, and chatting. They remained here four days and nights continuously, except that occasionally they were wrapped in a blanket to go away for food. Sometimes acorn meal porridge was brought them to drink. During these four days the old women, who appeared very much in earnest, danced and sang around the pit, waving branches of sagebrush to drive away the spirits. These women intended to keep up their dance constantly, but worn out with old age and continuous effort they sometimes dropped on the ground and fell asleep. Having rested they would then return to the dance. Occasionally the visitors would join in a wild boisterous dance, shouting, singing, and beating time with rattles. These efforts would encourage the tired old women upon whom the responsibility of continuous dancing seemed to rest.

Once during the dancing an old woman appeared and scattered a handful of silver coins over the crowd. Anyone was permitted to secure the coins, and the act caused much merriment. It was explained that this was done to teach the girls to be generous. After this many yards of calico and gingham and ten sacks of wheat were brought and given away to the old and needy, in order to teach the girls by example to be kind to the old and the poor. After this quantities of wild seeds used for food were brought and sowed broadcast on the girls. This was done to cause them to be prolific. During the ceremony grain was also often showered over the crowd by old women.

As the end of the ceremony drew near, the chief ordered all strangers away. The girls, with blankets wrapped about them, arose and received garlands of leaves prepared by friends and placed upon their heads. They were then led away to a hillside where they were shown the sacred stone, which it was said was to pro-

tect them. This stone is about 13 by 15 inches in size, shaped like a yoke, and thirty-five pounds in weight.<sup>1</sup> It was said to symbolize or have reference to the female organ of generation. Then friends of the girls hung their garlands on rocks and bushes about, and the sacred stone was buried again. Grain was scattered over all and the ceremony was complete.

It is believed, and taught the girls, that the sweating in the pit and the remaining ceremonies banish bad spirits from the girls; also that the sacred stone entertains and controls these spirits and that they will not return to the girls as long as these do right.

In 1879, on a visit to the National Museum of Mexico, the author was shown the sacrificial yoke or Maya stone, and was told by curator Mendoza that he did not believe that it had been used in sacrifices nor knew its employment or purpose. He presented the author with a small object of the same shape chipped from obsidian. This piece he thought bore the same relation to the large sacrificial yoke that small crosses worn by our people bear to the cross of Christ.

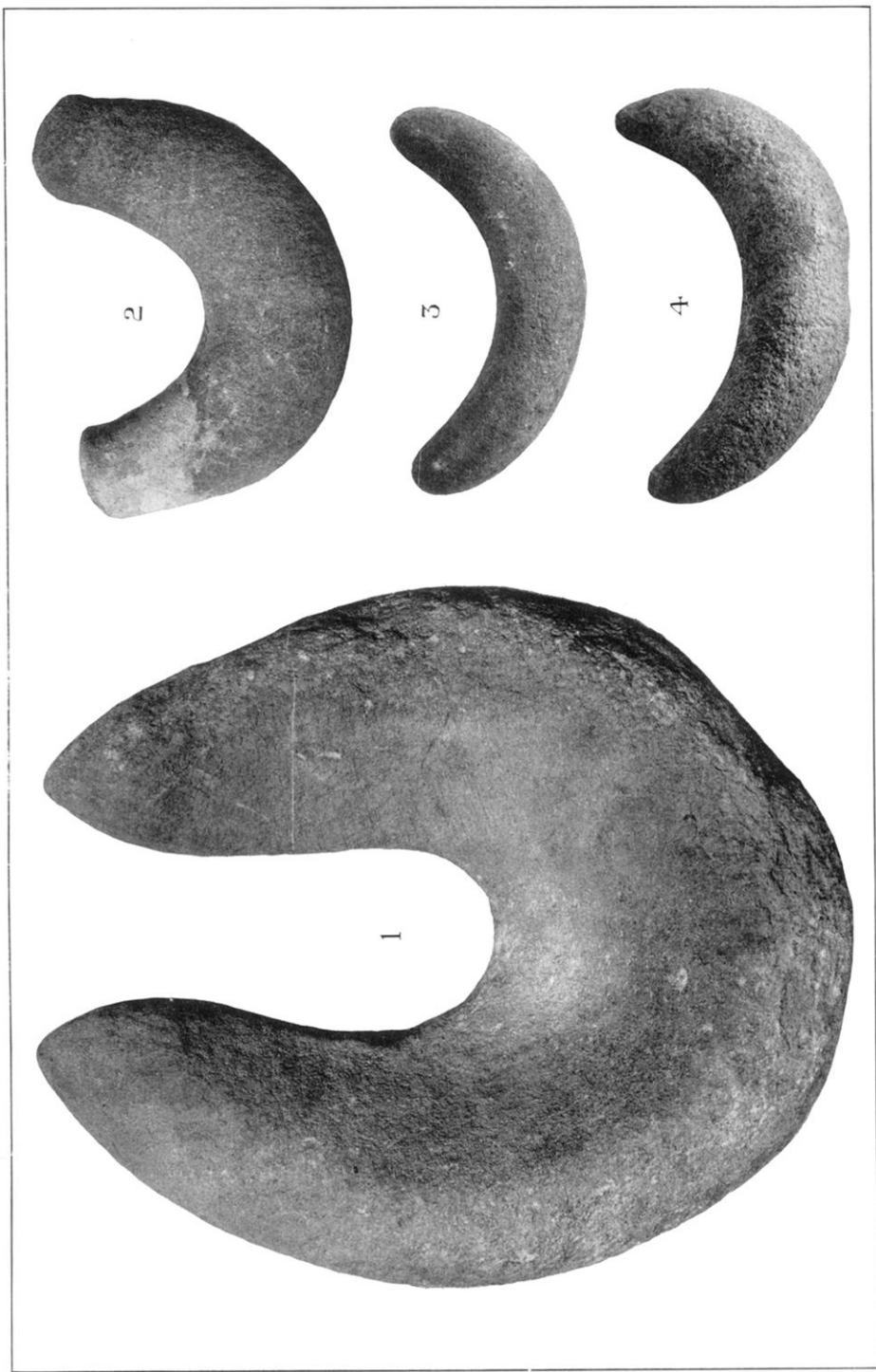
At a later date the author's son found among other relics on an ancient village site near Redondo Beach, California, a similarly shaped stone. This was about two inches in diameter and had been shaped by rubbing. In the belief that this represented the same idea as the small Mexican specimen of obsidian, it was preserved with it.

In 1893 a collection, including these pieces, was exhibited at the Chicago exposition. Here they attracted the attention of an Englishman who had specially studied the Mexican sacrificial yokes. His belief was that the Mexican objects represented the same idea as the two specimens from California and that no objects of the kind had previously been found in actual use.

Subsequently another specimen found at Santa Barbara has been obtained (pl. VII, 2). The two pieces from California first mentioned and the small Mexican piece are in the museum of Beloit College, Wisconsin, while the Santa Barbara specimen remains in the

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<sup>1</sup> According to information subsequently received from the author, the large stone shown in plate VII, 1, while similar to the one used in the ceremony at Campo, was not obtained there but at another rancheria some distance to the north in Shoshonean territory.



CURVED STONES FROM CALIFORNIA

1. From Southern California. 2. From Santa Barbara. 3. From San Joaquin Valley. 4. From Oakland.

author's possession. Attention is also called to the crescentic object, grooved about the middle, illustrated in the upper part of plate VI, p. 114, of Mr William H. Holmes' paper published in vol. 1, no. 1, of this journal. This specimen is reputed to have come from the auriferous gravels of California. It is hoped that interest may be aroused which will lead to further investigation of this subject, and that it may be learned whether the sacrificial stone yoke of the ancient Mexicans represented the same religious belief as this sacred curved stone. It may also be suggested that our own superstitions regarding the horseshoe, which is of the same general form, may be connected with such beliefs.

SOUTH PASADENA,  
CALIFORNIA.

NOTES BY A. L. KROEBER

Two stones similar to those described by Mr Rust are in museums in San Francisco and could therefore be exhibited at the meeting of the American Anthropological Association in connection with his paper. One of these specimens (pl. VII, 3) is in the California Academy of Sciences (cat. no. 40-1275). It will be seen that this piece resembles the one from Santa Barbara, but is somewhat smaller and less curved. It was found on a ridge between Poso creek and Kern river, that is to say, at the southern end of the San Joaquin valley, in territory occupied in recent times either by Yokuts or Shoshonean Indians.

The second specimen (figure 4 of the plate) is in the Anthropological Museum of the University of California (cat. no. 1-4562). The curvature in this piece is also not very pronounced. It differs from the last in having pointed ends and in a rougher finish, its surface showing pecking but no marks of rubbing. It is slightly grooved around the middle as if for suspension or attachment. Its length is not quite 9 inches. This specimen was found in 1872 by or through Mr C. D. Voy in the part of Oakland known as Brooklyn. It is thus from the shore of San Francisco bay, and there is some probability that it was found in a shellmound. Of course there is no direct information extant as to the use or purpose of either of these two specimens.

The following information as to the girls' puberty ceremony was obtained on inquiry in 1903 among the Luiseño Indians of Pauma and Rincon in northern San Diego county. These Indians are of Shoshonean stock, while those at Campo described by Mr Rust belong to the Yuman family.

A fire was made in a hole in the ground. In this tule was placed. The girls were laid on this on their backs. Two flat stones were heated and laid on their abdomens. Several girls, generally relatives, were usually put through the ceremony at once. They were called *ās*, and the ceremony *weghenish*. The ceremony lasted four or five days. A head-dress of a plant called *engwish* was worn by the girls for several months after the ceremony. During this period they could eat neither meat nor fish. The duration of this restriction does not seem to have been altogether fixed. The longer it was observed the better it was thought to be for the girls. In some cases it is said to have lasted a year. The ceremony was performed in order to make good women of the girls. They were talked to by their relatives and advised to be good and to give water and food to people.

The conclusion of the girls' period of restrictions at puberty was marked by paintings made by them on the smooth surfaces of large granite boulders. These paintings, some of which can still be seen, especially near the old village sites, consist of geometrical arrangements of red lines, usually in patterns forming vertical stripes several feet high. After making her painting, a girl was again free to eat meat and salt. The paintings were called *yunish*.

At one period, apparently at the beginning of the ceremony, the girls ate tobacco. Several small balls of this, it is said without admixture of any other substance, were swallowed by them, after which they drank hot water. If they retained the tobacco they were said to be good; but if they vomited it, they were regarded as bad.